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SUBJECT: NZ VOTES IN LOCAL ELECTIONS AMID LACK OF EXCITEMENT

Reftel: Auckland 118

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Characterized by voter apathy and predictable results, local government elections were held across New Zealand over the weekend of October 13-14. The most noteworthy result was in New Zealand's biggest and most politically important metropolitan area, Auckland, where the one term centre-left incumbent mayor of Auckland City was defeated by the center-right candidate. Local election results are historically no harbinger of national political results. Therefore, the ruling center-left Labour Party would have noted Auckland's election of a center-right mayor but it would not have been excessively troubled by it. End Summary.

Results in Key Races

¶2. (U) Over the weekend, cities and town across New Zealand elected mayors and local councils. Overall, there were few surprises with most results tracking pre-election polling and predictions. In Auckland City, the country's biggest city, incumbent center-left Auckland Mayor Dick Hubbard was ousted by the very man who he replaced in the previous election, John Banks. The center-right Banks, a former National Party Minister of Police, regained the Auckland mayoralty by a very comfortable 10,000 votes. In the nation's capital, sitting Wellington Mayor Kerry Prendergast retained her seat, but lost her deputy Alick Shaw who was voted out of local government. In Christchurch, former TV personality Bob Parker rode his strong name recognition to victory.

Voter Apathy a Hallmark of Elections

¶3. (U) Most noteworthy in these elections was the low voter turnout. A record low 42.5% of eligible voters cast votes in this year's elections, down from 46% three years ago. During New Zealand's last general election in 2005, eligible voter turnout was 77% (compared to 60% in the United States in 2004). Local Government New Zealand, an organization that represents the national interests of all 85 councils of New Zealand, is to investigate the downward trend in local government voter turnout. For many municipalities that witnessed the defeat of incumbents, the most oft-heard reason centered on homeowners' concerns over taxes.

Labour Watchful of Auckland Result

¶4. (SBU) As there is little correlation between local politics and a national politics, these election results cannot be regarded as a portent for next year's general election (reftel). Labour, nonetheless, would have watched the Auckland mayoral race with interest, as Labour has traditionally had strong support in Auckland. Given that Auckland provides New Zealand's biggest voting

pool, any party that expects to win the general election needs to do well in Auckland. Labour is currently trailing National in Auckland, however, with 50.3% of Aucklanders favoring National, and 29% supporting Labour, according to the August Herald Digipoll.

15. (SBU) However, post believes the result in Auckland was driven by local issues and personality rather than by national politics. Aucklanders cast their votes for Banks, not out of support for his center-right political values, but rather for his more authoritative and forceful personality, characteristics that Hubbard lacked. Aucklanders were also disenchanted with Hubbard's stand on some local issues, such as tax increases and the debacle over the proposed construction of a new sports stadium.

McCormick